



*Albino*  
*on File*

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Date: February 17, 2009  
Testimony of: John Simone, President & CEO  
To: Appropriations Conservation and Development Sub-Committee  
Re: Historic preservation is sustainable economic growth

Senator Duff, Representative Backer and members of the Appropriations Conservation and Development Sub-Committee, I am John Simone, President & CEO of the Connecticut Main Street Center and I am here today to testify on how historic preservation is a key component of sustainable economic growth.

The Connecticut Main Street Center (CMSC) is a statewide nonprofit agency with 38 member communities. Our mission is to help build economically vibrant traditional main streets as a foundation for healthy communities and we carry out our mission by providing training, technical assistance and by advocating for downtown-friendly policies. CMSC and our members are well positioned to support the challenging work of rebuilding a sustainable economy in the state.

While we are all too familiar with the host of negative economic trends we face, we can be encouraged by the increasing demand of people wanting to live in walkable mixed-use districts like our historic town centers. Empty nesters want to walk to services and shopping, knowledge workers and young professionals put a premium on the networks and connections that exist in downtowns with a mix of uses. The overriding message at the International Downtown Association conference I attended last spring was that, because of our changing demographics and lifestyle choices, downtowns are poised for their strongest decade in 50 years. With the bursting of the housing bubble in the suburbs, it is a historic moment for downtowns to recapture market share.

However, to take advantage of this growing trend for downtown living, we need to keep every tool we have already in place and continue to find new ones. Why? Because the mixed-use development and redevelopment that is the cornerstone of downtown revitalization is a lost art form. For more than three generations our policies have supported growth that is oriented to single-use, car-oriented development and impeded mixed-use development.

Despite the difficulty, with the right tools in place we can revitalize our town centers where the vast majority of our historic buildings are.

Historic preservation creates jobs, brings vacant buildings back on the tax rolls and adds value and vitality to adjacent buildings and neighborhoods. For every one million dollars spent in manufacturing 23.9 jobs are created, for new construction its 30.6 jobs and for the rehabilitation of historic buildings its 35.4 jobs. Historic buildings and places attract heritage tourists who stay longer and spend more money per day than other types of tourists.

Historic preservation is also the ultimate form of recycling. We need to keep getting the message out that the greenest building is most often the one already built. This is especially true of our older buildings. Commercial buildings built before 1920 are almost as efficient as today's so called "green" buildings. Buildings built before 1920 use on average 80.1 BTUs per square foot annually, the most efficient buildings built since 2000 use 79.7 BTUs.

At the same time, we must factor in all of the embedded energy in our historic buildings – the energy it took to make the materials and build the building in the first place. When you add the embedded energy, the cost of demolition and filling up land fills to the already efficient nature of historic buildings, it is clear that our historic buildings may be our most renewable resource.

We all understand that budgets at all levels of government and the private sector are facing significant challenges. We know we are going to have to make difficult choices and the choices we make will have long-term consequences right or wrong. We can only make the right choices if we make sure we allocate what resources we do have to the right strategic priorities. Investing in our historic town centers is responsible growth at its best.

The state has realized this by establishing the Community Investment Act (CIA). CIA uses a \$30 surcharge on real estate recording fees to support open space preservation, farmland preservation, affordable housing and historic preservation. I see this funding as just as important of a dedicated revenue stream as is our gasoline tax that provides resources for the Transportation Fund to support our key transportation infrastructure. CIA supports the infrastructure of Place – pristine open space, vibrant historic town centers, working farms and housing choices for everyone. Our infrastructure of Place is the intersection of sustainable economic development and a sustainable quality of life.

So, I urge all of us, as we deliberate over the choices we must make, to do everything we can to insure these choices will allow us to continue to use these economic stimulus tools that are already working so we can:

- Meet the growing demand for housing and transportation choices in walkable, compact mixed-use neighborhoods
- Reduce our reliance on foreign energy
- And keep our communities and state competitive in the global economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century

Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to share some thoughts as we face very important and challenging decisions.

Attachments:      Reinvestment statistics  
                         CMSC Member Network Map  
                         Preservation of Place grants (Community Investment Act)